

## Long Range Survey Results Reflect Contentment in Town

Town officials are taking to heart the message inherent in the town's survey of registered voters for the long range planning study - focus on how we can expand revenue without changing the character of the town.

Selectmen held a public meeting at town hall last Saturday to review the final report prepared by Beth Jordan of the Jordan Group, a local consulting firm hired by the town to execute and compile data from residents who responded to a 10-page questionnaire mailed to 9,047 registered voters.

Identified in the survey results were the 5 issues of most concern to voters: maintaining the residential character of the town; protecting and preserving the town's water supply; Duxbury Beach; financially support and maintain the quality of the school system; and keep the tax rate stable.

Selectmen were told that the profile of those who responded to the questionnaire closely matched the profile of registered voters in the town's 6 precincts. Also the spending decisions made at town meetings closely paralleled the issues respondents cited as most important to them.

Some 2375 people or 26 percent of the town's electorate responded to the survey.

The survey results reflect several polarizing issues among voters including the expansion of North Hill golf course, rezoning areas of town industrial or commercial development, affordable housing and expansion of recreation facilities.

The executive summary reads:

The beauty of the town with its beach and open nature are appreciated by the residents who participated in this survey. All groups and ages revealed that they like the ambience and charm.

On the other hand, almost one in 4 do not like the taxes and spending in Duxbury. Some complained about lack of services and commute, which are typical in a town 30 miles from a major city.

Duxbury voters agree on what is important to them. Duxbury residents from all precincts, in all stages of life, want to preserve the rural character of the town. They also want to fund the schools to support a superior school system.

Residents also care about clean drinking water, a stable tax rate issue and Duxbury Beach.

The tax issue, while important to most residents, holds more importance for older residents, those who have lived in the town for a long time, and those without children. Not surprising is the fact that those residents who are younger and those with children are more likely to name the schools as very important.

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This research indicates that newer residents are moving to town for the beauty and the schools. They are looking for additional recreational services and are less concerned with the tax rate. At the same time, they want to preserve the rural ambience of the town.

The majority of voters in general, are satisfied with town services. police and fire services are considered

satisfactory and most voters approve of their Selectmen/Town Manager system. Many residents say that the town is effectively providing recreational services although the majority would like to see a bike path network in town. Most people want the town to maintain ownership of North Hill golf course, but the idea of expansion is polarizing as almost as many who support expansion are against the idea.

It should not be surprising that Duxbury residents don't agree on everything. Several issues are polarizing in that a significant number of voters think that they are important while another significant group think that the issues are not important. Zoning for business, additional services for seniors, more recreational facilities, and affordable housing seem to be the most polarizing and will require further thought and understanding.

Many voters recognize that businesses or light commercial zoning many keep the tax rate down. At the same time, most people don't want businesses near their homes.

A majority of voters support the idea of a late bus service for school kids attending programs but they split on whether or not this should be paid for with user fees.

Most people are concerned with the quality of the town water and the impact of lawn chemicals. A majority are willing to reduce their water use, if necessary, and most favor a water filtration system. Duxbury voters are clearly in favor of town purchase of land to preserve it for the aquifer.

More than 3/4 of voters favor the one acre minimum zoning but some want it increased. More than one-half do not want a moderate sized auto free shopping area in town. Residents are split on the decision to build an office park or light industrial zone.

Almost everyone wants to see Duxbury maintain its current residential character. More than 1/2 do not want the town to purchase Duxbury Beach, but approximately the same number say that the town should fund damage repair to the beach. Most residents favor allowing 4-wheel drive vehicles on the beach, but more than 1/2 want to have a resident only limit, even if it costs residents more.

Most residents favor a combination of tax revenues and user fees to fund the transfer station.

Most people in Duxbury want the town to develop additional sources of revenue and many say that North Hill should generate revenue.

About 1/3 of the voters said that they would be willing to pay more taxes for some additional services such as those related to the schools, water purity, and bike paths or sidewalks. Others are not willing to pay higher taxes.

Duxbury Town Management should consider all of the above when developing its Long Range Strategic Plan. Clearly the prime focus should be to maintain the character of the town. Additionally, the town needs to better understand the split in voter opinion regarding the following issues:

- Re-zoning land for commercial or business use
- Expanding North Hill Golf Club
- Building a Senior Center
- Building a Youth Center
- Regionalizing ambulance services
- consolidating police/fire/ambulance
- adding traffic lights

Selectmen agreed to return to the neighborhoods where the grassroots effort in each precinct to launch the survey began. There they hope to involve citizens in helping to shape a long range plan based on the findings.

Copies of the long range report are available at town hall and at the library.